

September 2011

Rare Baroque painting on slate joins Fitzwilliam Museum's collection

New acquisition:

Marcantonio Bassetti (1586-1630)

The dead Christ supported by the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene, c. 1616

Oil on slate

37.2 x 28.6 cm

A rare 17th century painting on slate by Baroque artist Marcantonio Bassetti has joined the world-class collections of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

The dead Christ supported by the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene, painted circa 1616, has been acquired with the support of the Art Fund, the MLA/V&A Purchase Grant Fund, and the Gow Fund.

Painting on slate was a Veronese speciality and the gleaming dark background was especially well suited to dramatically-lit nocturnal scenes such as this, where the black of the slate provides the dark backdrop to the figures. It proved popular with rich patrons as the precious support added lustre to the paintings. Unfortunately slate is also fragile and paintings on it often survive in a broken state. This example has remained in very good condition showing to the full how effective this technique can be.

Marcantonio Bassetti was amongst a small group of artists who followed the example of Sebastiano del Piombo in sometimes painting on slate. After an initial training with Felice Brusasorci in Verona, Bassetti went to Venice where he was particularly influenced by Tintoretto, Veronese and Jacopo Bassano. He is recorded in Rome in 1616, but may have travelled there with his Veronese compatriots, Alessandro Turchi and Pasquale Ottino in 1614. In Rome Bassetti was influenced by the paintings of Caravaggio and Orazio Borgianni.

The iconography in the painting is unusual. The awkward position of Christ's body, almost falling into the Virgin's lap, has a dynamic quality that heightens the tension in a subject that is usually static. The winged angel about to wipe away the blood from Christ's wound is an unusual feature that helps balance the composition as does the haunting, almost ghostly, figure of the Magdalene.

The dead Christ supported by the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene can now be seen in the Fitzwilliam Museum's collections of Italian art from the 16th to the 18th centuries in Gallery 7.

- ENDS -



Press Release | The Fitzwilliam Museum

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Notes for Editors

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RB

www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk

OPEN: Tuesday – Saturday: 10.00 – 17.00, Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays: 12.00 – 17.00

ADMISSION FREE

The Fitzwilliam Museum houses the University of Cambridge's art collection and is a public museum and art gallery with an international reputation. More than half a million objects and works of art are held in five curatorial departments: Antiquities, Applied Arts, Coins and Medals, Manuscripts and Printed Books and Paintings, Drawings and Prints. The Fitzwilliam's treasures range from Ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman antiquities to the arts of the 21st century and include masterpieces by Titian, Canaletto, Stubbs, Constable, Monet, Renoir and Picasso, one of the world's foremost Rembrandt print collections, Handel music manuscripts and the famous Fitzwilliam Virginal Book, one of the most significant collections of Korean ceramics outside South-East Asia, medieval illuminated manuscripts and outstanding collections of pottery, porcelain and medieval coins. The Fitzwilliam Museum welcomes over 350,000 visitors a year, offers a wide-ranging programme of temporary exhibitions and events, and has an award-winning Education Service.

The Art Fund is the national fundraising charity, helping UK museums and galleries to buy, show and share art. It offers many ways of enjoying art through the National Art Pass which gives free entry to over 200 museums, galleries and historic houses across the country as well as 50% off major exhibitions. Over the past 5 years, the Art Fund has given £24 million to 248 museums and galleries to buy art. It also sponsors the UK tour of the ARTIST ROOMS collection - reaching several million people each year, and fundraises: recent campaigns include bringing in £6 million to save the Staffordshire Hoard for the West Midlands and Brueghel the Younger's The Procession to Calvary for Nostell Priory. It is funded entirely by its 80,000 supporters who believe great art should be for everyone to enjoy. Find out more about the Art Fund and how to buy a National Art Pass at www.artfund.org.

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